

Brahma,deva Sutta

The Brahma,deva Discourse

[The High God does not need any offering]
(Sāmyutta Nikāya 6.3/1:140-142)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Sutta summary

This short instructive discourse, with a gentle touch of spiritual humour, is about a woman who worships Brahmā (or God), regarded in ancient India as the creator god; yet her own son is an arhat. Brahmā himself comes down from his heaven and appears before a brahminee (the monk Brahma,deva's mother), admonishing her on the futility of her offerings, since brahmās do not partake of earthly offerings, but subsist on dhyanic joy. More importantly, Brahmā instructs the brahminee not to cast her religious sight too far away, when heaven lies right before her, in her own son: that her offerings would yield great fruit if she were to offer them to her own arhat son, Brahma,deva.

The Sāmyutta Commentary tells a similar story about **Shakra**, who on seeing the people of Aṅga and Magadha making preparations for a great sacrifice to Mahā Brahmā, feels pity for them. Appearing to them in the guise of Brahmā, he advises them to take their offerings to the Buddha and listen to his teachings. (SA 1:351 f)

Long before the rise of modern theism, the Buddha has already pointed to finding life's answer and liberation within oneself, not in an external power, real or imagined. As long as we do not realize that we create our own God or gods, and that they are but hypostases of our desire for control and power, we will continue to find spiritual answers outside of ourselves, and fail to see the godliness and goodness within.

2 Where prayer does not help

The Ādiya Sutta (A 5.41) refers to “offering to devas” (*deva, balī*),¹ which is somewhat problematic. The Pali Canon clearly records the Buddha as declaring that prayer does not bring one spiritual release. **The It̐ha Sutta** (A 5.43), given by the Buddha to Anāthapiṇḍika, is very instructive:

Householder, there are these five things that are desirable, beloved and agreeable but difficult to obtain in the world. What are the five?

Long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and rebirth in heaven.

Of these five things, householder, **I do not teach that they are to be obtained through prayer (*āyācana, hetu*) or through wishing (*patthanā, hetu*).**² If one could obtain them through prayer or through wishing, who would not obtain them?

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have long life, it is not proper that he should pray for long life or take delight in doing so. He should rather *follow a way of life that is conducive to long life* [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain long life, be it divine or human.

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have beauty,... He should rather *follow a way of life that is conducive to beauty*...

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have happiness,... He should rather *follow a way of life that is conducive to happiness*...

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have fame,... He should rather *follow a way of life that is conducive to fame*...

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have rebirth in heaven, it is not proper that he should pray for rebirth in heaven or take delight in doing so. He should rather *follow a way*

¹ A 5.41/3:45.2(4e). However, from the context, we know that the Buddha is addressing those ancient Indians who are following such practices. As such, this is a teaching whose meaning has to be drawn out (*neyy'attha*) and culturally bound, and not to be taken as universally applicable.

² “Wishing,” *patthanā*, also “desire, request, aspiration, request, prayer, vow.”

of life that is conducive to rebirth in heaven [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain rebirth in heaven.

(A 5.43/3:47-49 abridged) = SD 47.2

The Brahma,deva Sutta speaks not only against “muttering prayers” and making offerings to some external power, but admonishes one instead to invest one’s piety and charity in the virtue of a spiritual practitioner. The true “God” or highest goodness is not out there in heaven, but in one’s spiritual life; in this case, that goodness is found in the arhat Brahma,deva.

3 The true path to Brahmā

In verse 565 of the Brahma,deva Sutta, Brahmā Sahampati the brahminee: “You know not the path to Brahmā, so why mutter prayers.” The Saṃyutta Commentary says *brahma, patha* [v565d] is a name for the 4 wholesome dhyanas (*kusala-j, jhānāni*). The resultant dhyanas (*vipaka-j, jhānāni*) are called their path of living (*jīvita, patha*). Ignorant of this path, why do you mutter prayers? For the brahmās subsist on dhyanic joy (*sappītika-j, jhānena yāpenti*), they do not eat curdled milk sprinkled with herbs and seeds (SA 1:207). In **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), **Dhānañjāni Sutta** (M 97) and **Subha Sutta** (M 99), the path to Brahmā, described as the four form dhyanas, is called the path to “fellowship with Brahmā” (*brahmānam saḥavyatā*).³

The locus classicus for *brahma, patha* (or *brahma, saḥavyatā*), in the Buddhist sense, is **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), where the Buddha explains to Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja that the “highest path” or “the path to Brahmā” is none other than the “fruits of recluseship” (*sāmañña, phala*). Here, however, in keeping with the spiritual level of the duo, the Buddha speaks fully of moral virtue, but mentions only the first dhyana and concludes with the cultivation of lovingkindness.⁴ The full “fruits of recluseship” are detailed in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2).⁵

4 Samvega

To show Brahma,deva’s mother the futility of her misplaced piety and to put her on the “true path,” Brahmā Sahampati thinks, “This brahminee, Brahma,deva’s mother, has been making a regular offering to Brahmā. Let me approach her and rouse samvega [a sense of urgency] in her” [6]. Two important religious powers are at play here: the first is that of Brahmā’s theophany; the other is the arousing of samvega (a sense of urgency)⁶ in the brahminee. In the first case, we see the Indian conception of *darśana* (P *dassana*), or the “seeing” of holy persons, which in itself is regarded as a great blessing:

Seeing recluses—this is most auspicious (*samañānañ ca dassanaṃ | etam maṅgalam uttamam*)
(Maṅgala Sutta, Sn 266 = Khp 5)

A concept closely connected with the “seeing” of the Buddha and holy persons is that of *samvega*, “sense of urgency,” which the *Pali-English Dictionary* defines as “agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world).” It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms that refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth. For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, often leading to renunciation, whereas in the case of a monastic, it urges him to exert more energy in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. “A feeling of urgency,” *samvega*, that is, an overpowering experience of awe or a religious experience that induces one to ask deep questions of life and seek their answers.

³ D 13.76-79/ 1:250 f; M 97.31.-35/2:194-196, M 99.23-27/2:207 f, On *brahma, patha*, see also A 3:346, Tha 689.

⁴ D 13/1:235-252 = SD 1.8.

⁵ D 2/1:47-86 = SD 8.10.

⁶ See **Somanassa S** (It 2.1.10) = SD 16.13.

The **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) and the **Samvega Sutta** (A 4.118) list the four places that arouse feelings of urgency (*saṃvejanīya-t,thānā*) as those where the Buddha was born, where he awakened, where he gave the first discourse, and where he attained final nirvana.⁷

The Canon gives a number of examples of samvega. The **Cūḷa Tapā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 37) records how Moggallāna rouses a sense of urgency (for spiritual development) in Shakra, Vessavaṇa and the gods of the 33 by making the celestial Vejayanta Palace quake and tremble through his psychic powers (M 37.11/1:254 f). The **Vana Saṃyutta** (ch 9 of the Saṃyutta Nikāya) consists of 14 suttas all dealing with the rousing of the sense of urgency for spiritual development (S 9/1:197-205). In the **Mahā Hatthi,paḍōpama Sutta** (M 28), Sāriputta speaks of samvega.⁸

5 An arhat is not reborn

The last two paragraphs of §3 of the Brahma,deva Sutta says:

**He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more for this state of being.”
And the venerable Brahmadeva became one of the arhats.**

*Khīṇā jāti vūsitāṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparam itthattāya ti abbhaññāsi.
Aññataro ca pan’āyasma Brahmadevo arahatāṃ ahoṣi.*

This is the canonical stock passage describing the attainment of arhathood. The sutta Commentary says that the sentence beginning “He directly knew...” refers to “the plane of reviewing” (*paccavekkhaṇa,-bhūmi*) (SA 1:205). **Bhikkhu Bodhi**, in his Saṃyutta translation, makes the following useful note:

The commentaries propose two ways of interpreting *nāparam itthattāya*, depending on whether the last word is taken as dative or ablative. [SA:] “Now there is no development of the path again done ‘for this state’ (*itthabhāvāya* = *itthattāya* as dative), that is, for the state of the sixteen tasks or for the destruction of the defilements. (The ‘sixteen tasks’ are the four tasks of the path—full understanding, abandonment, realization and development⁹—taken in conjunction with each of the four supramundane paths.) Or alternatively: *itthattāya* = *itthabhāvato* (the ablative, “beyond thisness”). Now there is no further continuum of aggregates. These five aggregates stand fully understood like a tree cut down at the root.”

I take *itthattāya* as a dative meaning “for this state of being,” ie for existence in *any* state of being, so that the phrase conveys the same sense as the alternative “roar of liberation,” *natthi dāni punabbhavo*, ‘Now there is no renewed existence.’¹⁰ Elsewhere (eg at D 1:17,33; M 2:130,16 ff; A 1:63,30-64,18) *itthatta* signifies the human state (or perhaps the entire sensory realm) as contrasted with the higher states of being. As the stem form *itthatta* is clearly neuter, it is difficult to accept the commentarial explanation of *itthattāya* as an ablative. (S:B 433 n376; citations normalized)

6 Some difficult terms

6.1 Upadhi. The verses of the Brahma,deva Sutta have many epithets of the arhat, the most important or difficult of which will be discussed here. The arhat is said to be “without acquisitions” (*nirūpadhika*) [v566b], that is, he is free of the *upadhi* of defilements, volitional formations, and sensual pleasures. The Porāṇa-ṭīkā says that “the *upadhi* of aggregates” is not mentioned because they still exist.¹¹ The Pali

⁷ D 16.5.8/2:140; A 4.118/2:120 f.

⁸ For a more detailed study of samvega, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (7f).

⁹ As at S 56.11/5:422,3-30.

¹⁰ See S 22.27/3:29,30; etc.

¹¹ Qu by S:B 434 n380.

term *upādi* is often translated as “clinging” (from *upa* + *ā* + *dā* “to take”), and is often confused with the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *upadhi* or *upādhi* (meaning “remnant, substrate,” or more correctly, “acquisitions” or “belongings,” attachment to which leads to rebirth). Despite the subtle but important difference in meaning, most modern commentators regard them as synonymous, and do not try to explain how and why the difference arose.¹²

6.2 *Atideva, patto*. Another interesting epithet of the arhat is that he is one “who has surpassed the devas” (*atideva, patto*) [v566b], that is, he has attained to the state beyond that of a deva above the devas, the state of a brahmā above the brahmās (SA 1:207). Although the Commentary is silent here, there is evidently a pun on Brahma,deva’s name. **The Culla Niddesa** speaks of three kinds of devas:

...[there are] three kinds of devas, namely, devas by convention (*sammati, devā*), devas by birth (*upapatti, devā*) and devas by purity (*visuddhi, devā*).

Who are devas by convention? Kings, princes, and queens: they are called **devas by convention**.

Who are devas by birth? The Four Great Kings [Cātum, mahārājā], the 33 Devas [Tāvataṃsa], the Yāma devas, the Tusita devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who lord over the creations of others, the devas of Brahma’s Host, and devas beyond them: these are **devas by birth** [born devas, congenital devas].

What are devas by purity? The Tathāgata’s disciples who are arhats whose mental cankers are destroyed and the pratyeka Buddhas: these are **devas by purity**.

“The Blessed One is the deva beyond devas” means that, by having known, weighed, recognized [judged], understood, and by having made clear, (knows) by direct knowledge, he is a superior deva (*adhi, deva*) amongst conventional devas, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas by birth, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas of purity. (Nc:Se 30/312/653; Nc:Be 226; cf Vbh 422)¹³

The term *atideva, patto*, “who has surpassed the devas,” in the Brahma,deva Sutta, given as an epithet of the arhat, clearly refers to the last of the three kinds of devas, that is, the “deva by purity” (*visuddhi, deva*).

6.3 *Akiñcana*. Another term used in the Brahma,deva Sutta to describe the arhat is one “owning nothing” (*akiñcana*) [v566c]. A **Dhammapada** verse—in the Brāhmaṇa Vagga—reflects the same sentiment:

For whom, in front and behind,	<i>yassa pure ca pacchā ca</i>	
And in the middle, there is nothing,	<i>majjhe ca n’atthi kiñcanaṃ</i>	
Who has nothing, ungrasping,	<i>akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ</i>	
Him I call a brahmin.	<i>tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ</i>	(Dh 421)

For one “who has nothing” (*akiñcanaṃ*), there is no “grasping through craving” in the three aspects (past, future, present) (DhA 26.38/4:230).

The Commentary on **the Na Santi Sutta**,¹⁴ explaining the line, “Sufferings torment not one who has nothing” (*akiñcanaṃ nānupatanti dukkhā*), says that the arhat is devoid of the “something,” namely, lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) (SA 1:63). In **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and **the Gotthatta Sutta** (S 41.7) the arhat is also said to be one “owning nothing”:

Rāgo kho āvuso kiñcano, doso kiñcano, moho kiñcano. Te khī’āsavassa bhikkhuno pahīnā ucchinnamūlā tālāvatthu, katā anabhāvakatā āyatim anuppāda, dhammā.

¹² See KR Norman, “Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*,” *The Buddhist Forum*, vol 3, ed Tadeusz Skorupski & Ulrich Pagel, 1995:215. See also SD 9.15 & 14.1(3).

¹³ Cf Nc:Ne 238 qu Norman 1981:149 fn 1 & Sn:N 2:391 n1148). See **Kaṇṇakatthala S** (M 90) = SD 10.8.

¹⁴ S v104 = 1.34/1:23.

Friends, lust is something; hate is something; delusion is something. In a monk whose cankers have been destroyed, they [lust, hate, delusion] are abandoned, uprooted, made like palm stump, done away with so that they are no longer subject of future arising.

(M 43.36/1:298 = S 41.7/4:297)

The Commentary to **the Accharā Sutta**¹⁵ says that there are 4 ways a monk uses his alms:

- (1) an immoral monk uses them (undeservedly) like *a thief*;
- (2) a virtuous ordinary person who does not reflect on them is like *a debtor*;
- (3) a trainee (*sekhā*, ie one of the seven kinds of saints, short of the arhat-become) uses them as *an inheritance*;
- (4) an arhat uses them as *a worthy owner*. (AA 1:71 f)

Paradoxically here, the arhat is regarded as the “owner” of the almsfood, that is, in the sense that he has lived the holy life to its fullest, that by owning “nothing,” he has, as it were, everything. As he creates no new karma, he will face no karmic fruit.

6.4 Anañña,posiyo, “supporting no other” [v566c], that is, the arhat does not maintain a wife and children, harbours no passion, nor will he maintain another body after the present one (SA 1:207).¹⁶ Discourses such as **the Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122)¹⁷ and the ancient **Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 35-75),¹⁸ speak of the dangers of socializing without focusing on one’s personal development, and of the dangers of evil friends.

It is important to understand here that this teaching of spiritual solitude is not that of an anti-social hermitry, but rather that mental cultivation or meditation can only be effectively by oneself alone. A truly spiritual person is always alone, but never lonely (not missing anyone); he may be *with* the crowd (for its benefit), but he is never *of* the crowd—he is a lotus above troubled waters. In the quest for mental focus leading to spiritual liberation, one has to travel the path alone.

Furthermore, it should be said that when one is faced with the greatest of difficulties or when one is at the height of true success, one will inevitably be by oneself. This is the nature of existential suffering: one faces one greatest pains alone. Only when one has stepped down from that pinnacle of pain or of triumph, that one finds oneself in the company of others again. One enters this world alone; one leaves it alone. One can only understand both in one’s aloneness. Yet, when one realizes that there is no self or abiding entity, one transcends even such aloneness.

6.5 Pacchā, purattham. “For him [the arhat] there is nothing behind nor in front” (*na tassa pacchā na purattham atthi*) [v568a]. The sutta Commentary explains: What is “behind” (*pacchā*) is the past; what is “in front” (*purattham*) is the future. He has nothing behind him and nothing in front because he is without desire or lust for past and future aggregates (SA 1:207).

In the four **Bhaddekaratta Suttas** (M 131-134)—spoken respectively by the Buddha, by Ānanda, by Mahā Kaccāna, and by the Buddha to Lomasak’āniya—the practitioner is admonished to train his mind on the present moment, watching it with insight, thus:

Let one not go back after the past,
Nor harbour fond hope for the future.
For what is past has passed away,
And the future has not yet come. (M 131-134/3:187-202)¹⁹

The benefits of the practice exhorted by the Bhadd’eka,ratta Suttas are mentioned in **the Araññe Sutta** (S 1.10), where a forest deva asks the Buddha why the monks meditating in the forests, living only on a

¹⁵ A 1.6.3-5/A 1:10 f.

¹⁶ See Sn 65 = Ap 11; U 4 = 31.

¹⁷ M 122/3:108-118 = SD 11.4: see esp Intro.

¹⁸ Sn 1.2/pp6-12 = vv35-75.

¹⁹ = Ap 545.20-23/506; Nett 149); also see Dh 348, 421; Sn 949; Tha 537. See SD 8.9.

single meal a day, look very serene. The Buddha’s reply, echoing of the sentiment of the Bhadd’eka,ratta Suttas, thus:

They do not sorrow after the past,
Nor do they long for the future.
They keep themselves to what is before them—
Hence their demeanour is so serene.
Through longing for the future,
Through sorrowing after the past,
Fools dry up and wither away
Like green reed that is cut down. (S 1.10/1:5)²⁰

6.6 Vidhumo [v568b]. The Commentaries explain: He is smokeless (*vi- + dhūmo*, “without smoke”) because he has destroyed the smoke of anger (SA 1:207; SnA 405 ad **Sn 460**, *kodha,dhūma,vigamena*). The Cūḷa Niddesa (Nc 576), commenting on **Sn 1048** (the last stanza of the Puṇṇaka Māṇava Pucchā), gives a long exegesis. The word appears in **the Amba,sakkhara Peta,vatthu** (Pv 4.1.34a), where its Commentary glosses it as “rid of the smoke of wrong thought” (*vigata,micchā,vitakka,dhūma*, PvA 230).

The verb, “it smokes,” is *dhūmayati* or *dhūmayati*, has both a literal sense of “it smokes, smoulders, chokes,” and a metaphorical sense of “it obscures, clouds over.” The metaphorical sense is found in **the Vammika Sutta** (M 23), where, in the parable of the anthill, the anthill “fumes by night and flames by day” (*vammiko rattim dhūmayati divā pajjalati*). The venerable Kumāra Kassapa explains that “**the anthill**” represents the body; and

“**it fumes by day**” means “when one, by night, repeatedly thinks about and repeatedly ponders on one’s actions during the day” (*yaṃ kho...divā kammante ārabha rattim anuvitakketi anuvicarati*); and

“**it flames by night**” means “the actions one undertakes during the day through body, speech and mind after thinking and pondering on them by night” (*yaṃ kho...rattim anuvitakketaṃ anuvicāretvā divā kammante payojeti kāyena vācāya manasā*). (M 22.4/1:144)

It is clear from the references quoted so far that “smoke” (both as verb and noun) usually refers to the habit of negative thinking or the nature of an ill-trained mind.

6.7a Nikkhitta,daṇḍo tasa,thāvaresu, “One with rod laid down towards the moving and the still [the firm and the frail]” [v568c]. The arhat is totally harmless towards all forms of living beings, and is utterly compassionate to them. The expression, “one with rod laid down” (*nikkhitta,daṇḍo*), is also in **the Revatī Vimāna,vatthu**, identical to **the Revatī Peta,vatthu**:

Who, coming from the deva world to the human world, when asked, should speak to me thus:
“Give gifts to those who have laid down the rod; give clothing, lodging, food and drink.
For the miserly, the angry, the evil-natured, obtains not the fellowship of those heaven-bound.”

*Ko deva,lokato manussa,lokaṃ, gantvāna puṭṭho me evaṃ vadeyya:
Nikkhitta,dandesu dadātha dānaṃ, acchādanaṃ seyyam ath’anna,pānaṃ,
Na hi maccharī rosako pāpa,dhammo, saggūpagānaṃ labhati saavyataṃ*
(Vv 5.2.19 f/79 = Pv 4.4.19 f/61; See Vv:H 106)

6.7b Tasa,thāvāra, “the moving and the still” [v568c], is a common expression in the Pali Canon.²¹ The Saṃyutta Commentary says that the “moving” are the worldlings (*puṭhujjanā*), the “still” are those “with cankers destroyed” (*khīṇ’āsavā*), that is, the arhats (SA 1:207). According to the Pali-English Dictionary (PED), the term *tasa* is metaphorically used of people who are in fear and trembling, as

²⁰ For further discussion, see **Bhadd’eka,ratta Sutta** (M 131) = SD 8.9 Intro (4).

²¹ See M 2:105 = Tha 876; Sn 146, 394, 629, 704; Nm 2:487 f (x5).

distinguished from *thāvara*, a self-possessed and firm being (= arhat, KhA 245).²² In this sense, *tasa* is derived from *tasati* both in the sense of:

- (1) Skt *tr̥syati*, to be thirsty; fig: to crave (S 2:13, Miln 254), and
- (2) Ved *trasati*, to tremble, shake, to have fear, to be frightened (Sn 394, Nc 479, KhA 245).

Andersen equates *tasa* with the Sanskrit *trasa*, and explains it as “moving, trembling, feeble” (*Pali Glossary* 111). The PED also says that *thāvara* is always used in connection with *tasa*, contrasting or comprising the movable beings (animal world) and the immovable (vegetable world), and quotes Sn 394,²³ It 31 f as examples.²⁴

Most traditional translators render *tasā vā thāvarā vā* (Sn 146b) as “the frail or the firm” or such like, and interpret it as referring to those who still have craving (*tasā*) and the arhats (*thāvarā*) respectively, in keeping with the Commentary (KhA 245). These beings should be included in our lovingkindness. Un-awakened beings may need our lovingkindness; but arhats do not need our thoughts so that they may “be happy-minded” (Sn 147d). Arhats are beyond good and evil, and have transcended happiness and sorrow. However, we should include them so that our lovingkindness is truly all-inclusive positive emotion.

On the other hand, arhats (like the Buddha) are not “beings” (*sattā*) as we know them, as they have gone beyond classification (Sn 209d). Scholars like KR Norman and L Schmithausen take the expression in the sense of “(all beings) moving and unmoving”; Schmithausen however believes that, from a historical viewpoint, the expression refers to “animals and plants.”²⁵ Norman gives this etymology: *tasa* < Skt *trasa*, “moving,” ie “the collective body of moving or living beings” [syn: *jaṅgama*, *cala*] as opposed to *sthāvara*, “standing still, stationary, not moving, fixed, stable, immovable” (SED svv) [cf *sthāvara* → P *thera*, “elder monk”].²⁶

6.8 *Viseni, bhūto*, “aloof from the crowd” [v568a], which the Sāmyutta Commentary, following a popular idiom, explains as “disarmed, without the army of defilements” (*kilesa, senāya viseno jāto*) (SA 1:207). Like Bodhi (S:B 435 n382), I follow KR Norman’s suggestion: “The verb *viseneti* (S 3:89,31) is explained (SA 2:296,22): *viseneti no usseneti ti vikirati na sampiṇḍeti*. [“*Viseneti* means ‘not associating,’ that is, not mixing with, not combining.”] The BHS form, however, is *viśrenī, bhūta*, and the absolutive of the verb is *viśrenayitvā*, implying a denominative verb from *viśrenī*.²⁷ The meaning of *viśrenī* would presumably be “without association, not associating.”²⁸ In the **Udāna, varga**²⁹ (Uv 11.12), we find *visenī-krtvā*, translated into Tibetan to mean “free from the crowd” (S:B id).

6.9 *Ogha, tiṅṇam*, “crossed the flood” [v570c], here metaphorically refers to the 4 “floods” (*oghā*) (see the **Ogha Sutta**):³⁰

- (1) The flood of sensuality (*kām’ogha*) = lustful desire for the five cords of sensual pleasure (pleasant forms, etc) (*kāma, guṇa*).³¹
- (2) The flood of existence (*bhav’ogha*) = lustful desire for form-sphere existence and formless-sphere existence and attachment to dhyanas.
- (3) The flood of views (*diṭṭh’ogha* = the 62 [bases of] wrong views) (D 1:12-38).
- (4) The flood of ignorance (*avijj’ogha*) = not knowing the four noble truths.

²² See Sn:P n4:23c.1.

²³ See Sn:P n26:24d.

²⁴ Cf M 2:105 & M:H 2:290.4, SnA 2:468 493 & esp Kh:N 285.40.

²⁵ “Status of Plants in Earliest Buddhism,” 1990. Cf Mvst 1:207 *jaṅgama-sthāvara* (Mvst:J 1:164 “animal or plant”), 2:10 *calaṃ sthāvara* (Mvst:J 2:10 “animal or plant”).

²⁶ See **Āṅgulimāla S** (M 86.18n = SD 5.11); also Sn:P n8:4b for further details.

²⁷ see BHSD sv.

²⁸ Sn:N 307 f n793.

²⁹ Ed Franz Bernhard, 1965.

³⁰ S 45.171/5:59.

³¹ See M 13.7 = SD 6.9, A 6.63.3b = SD 6.11.

The Commentary explains that they are called “floods” because they keep beings submerged inside sam-sara and do not allow them to rise up to higher states and to nirvana (SA 1:17).³²

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³² On the flood imagery, see also S vv 298-300, 511-513, 848 f.

The Brahma,deva Discourse

(S 6.3/1:140-142)

Brahmadeva's arhathood

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's Park in Jeta's Forest near Sāvattihī.

2 Now at that time, a certain brahminee had a son named Brahma,deva who had gone forth from the household life into homelessness in the presence of the Blessed One.

3 Then, dwelling alone, aloof (from society), heedful, exertive, and resolute, in no long time, he reached and remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself right here and now.

He directly knew: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done is what had to be done, there is no more for this state of being."

And the venerable Brahmadeva became one of the arhats.³³

Brahmā appears to Brahmadeva's mother

4 Then, in the morning, the venerable Brahma,deva, having dressed himself and taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattihī for alms. Walking on the unbroken almsround³⁴ in Sāvattihī, he came to his own mother's house. [141]

5 Now at the time, the brahminee, Brahmadeva's mother, had been making a regular offering to Brahmā.³⁵

6 Then it occurred to Brahmā Sahampati:

"This brahminee, Brahma,deva's mother, has been making a regular offering to Brahmā. Let me approach her and rouse samvega [a sense of urgency]³⁶ in her."

7 Then, just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā world and reappeared in the residence of the brahminee, Brahmadeva's mother.

8 Then, standing mid-air, Brahmā Sahampati addressed the brahminee, Brahmadeva's mother, in verse:

Brahmā Sahampati's verses

565 Far from here, brahminee, is the Brahmā world,
To which you make a regular offering.
Brahminee, Brahmā is not a partaker of such food.
You know not the path to Brahmā, so why mutter prayers.³⁷

566 Brahminee, this Brahma,deva

³³ The last two paras here: *Khīṇā jāti vūsitam brahmacariyam katham karaṇīyam nāparam itthattāyā ti abbhañ-ñāsi. Aññataro ca pan'āyasma Brahmadevo arahatam ahoṣi.* This is the canonical stock passage describing the attainment of arhathood. Comy says that the sentence beginning "He directly knew..." refers to "the plane of reviewing" (*paccavekkhaṇa, bhūmi*) (SA 1:205). See Intro (5).

³⁴ *Sapadānam piṇḍāya caramāno.* This is one of the 13 ascetic practices, ie going for alms along a predetermined route, without discriminating between regular givers and other, between those who would give and those who would not. This is the practice of faring house-to-house for almsfood (*sapadāna, cārik'aṅga*) which is taken up with the resolution: *loluppacāram paṭikkhipāmi, sapadāna, cārik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject faring according to what is desired; I take upon myself the practice of the house-to-house farer.) On the 13 ascetic practices, see Vism 2.6/60, 2.31/67 f & SD 3.15 Intro (2).

³⁵ *Āhutim niccam paggaṇhāti.* Comy details what appears to be an elaborate ceremony where milk-rice (*pāyāsa, piṇḍa*) was offered to Brahmā along with invocations (SA 1:206).

³⁶ Samvega, see Intro (4).

³⁷ "The path to Brahmā," *brahma, patha*. See Intro (3).

- Is one without acquisitions,³⁸ who has surpassed the devas,³⁹
 Owing nothing,⁴⁰ supporting no other:⁴¹
 (This) monk has entered your house for alms.
- 567 Worthy of offerings, knowledge-master, whose mind is cultivated:
 He is one who deserves gifts from humans and devas.
 Having pushed away evil, one without clinging,
 Cooled, he comes seeking alms.
- 568 For him there is nothing behind nor in front:⁴²
 At peace, smokeless,⁴³ untroubled, one without desire.
 One with rod laid down towards the moving and the still [the firm and the frail]⁴⁴—
 Let him eat your offering, the foremost alms.
- 569 Aloof from the crowd,⁴⁵ with peaceful mind,
 He fares like a tamed elephant, unperturbed.
 A monk of pure virtue, well liberated in mind—
 Let him eat your offering, the foremost alms.⁴⁶
- 570 With bright faith in him, without wavering, [142]
 Place your offering in one worthy of it.
 Having seen a sage who has crossed the flood,⁴⁷
 Brahminee, make merit that leads to future happiness!”

Redactors' verse

- 571 With bright faith in him, without wavering,
 She placed her offering in one worthy of it.
 Having seen a sage who has crossed the flood,
 The brahminee made merit that leads to future happiness.⁴⁸

— evaṃ —

050422; rev 051017; 070924; 080422; 090801

³⁸ “Without acquisitions,” *nirūpadhika*, ie free of *upadhi* of defilements, volitional formations, and sensual pleasures. See Intro 6.1.

³⁹ “Who has surpassed the devas,” *atideva,patto*. See Intro 6.2.

⁴⁰ “Owing nothing,” *akiñcana*; a common epithet of an arhat. See Intro 6.3.

⁴¹ “Supporting no other,” *anañña,poṣiyo*, ie that is, he does not maintain a wife and children, harbours no passion, nor will he maintain another body after the present one (SA 1:207). See Sn 65 = Ap 11; U 4 = 31.

⁴² Comy: What is “behind” (*pacchā*) is the past; what is “in front” (*purattham*) is the future. He has nothing behind him and nothing in front because he is without desire or lust for past and future aggregates (SA 1:207). See Intro (6.5).

⁴³ Comy: He is smokeless (*vidhūmo*) because he has destroyed the smoke of anger (SA 1:207). See Intro (6.6).

⁴⁴ *Nikkhitta,daṇḍo tasa,thāvaressu*. See Intro (6.7).

⁴⁵ “Aloof from the crowd,” *viseni,bhūto*. See Intro (6.8).

⁴⁶ On an attempt at categorizing an hierarchy of benefits of giving, see **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142/3:253-257) = SD 1.9.3.

⁴⁷ “Crossed the flood,” *ogha,tiṇṇam*. See Intro (6.9).

⁴⁸ Comy: This verse was added by redactors (SA 1:208).